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Chinese Community Centres in the UK: Changing Landscape, Challenges and Strategies for the Future

By Polly Sen-yin Ku and Dr Yeow Poon

Editorial board: Merlene Emerson MBE and Dr Lisa Yeung-Donaldson

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Executive Summary

This reports aims to document the changes and coping mechanisms experienced by Chinese community organisations in the last ten years. Based on information gathered from key informants from 14 Chinese community organisations in four major UK cities – London, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool, long-serving community leaders shared their insights on adapting to meet the changing demands and possible solutions for improving service viability and long-term sustainability.

Key findings

- ❖ Three notable demographic trends are developing across all Chinese community centres: ageing membership, who are predominantly Cantonese-

speaking, and an increasing number of Mandarin-speaking users, as well as growing numbers of British born second and third generation Chinese.

- ❖ There has been a sharp decrease in local council funding level. Some community centres have seen financial support from local councils drop to 20% in three years; in some cases, all support was withdrawn.
- ❖ The practice of funding community groups has changed. Funding applications made by single-ethnic groups are less attractive to potential public and private grant givers. Instead smaller groups are encouraged to form larger multi-ethnic consortia, bid for contracts and share out resources.
- ❖ Project-based funding, which is a less sustainable way to finance the future of community centres, has largely replaced the block grants that community centres used to receive.
- ❖ General advice services and luncheon clubs are underfunded. Some centres have resorted to self-finance these services to keep them accessible to the elderly and the most vulnerable.
- ❖ Translation and interpretation services remain indispensable to older Chinese and new immigrants, which are often linked with other areas of service like general advice and advocacy.
- ❖ The increasing demand for culturally sensitive day care and home care services among older Chinese population far outstrips supply. This is compounded by the chronic shortage of bi-lingual care workers.
- ❖ Some community centres have managed to attract a rising number of non-Chinese service users, mainly for cultural and recreation programmes.
- ❖ Cantonese, Mandarin and English speakers have difficulty mingling with each other, as their social backgrounds and aspirations are not the same. In a similar vein, recently-formed community organisations set up by migrants

from Mainland China have little interaction with the more established UK Chinese community.

- ❖ More emphasis has been placed on providing health-related and well-being recreational activities to tackle social isolation. Mental health support has been identified as an emerging area of service, as well as advice and support for mainland Chinese students.

Lessons and ways forward

- ❖ Diversify and develop new income streams. These include setting up social enterprises, charging modest amounts for some services, renting out rooms/halls and bidding for service contracts as part of a consortium, as well as continuing to apply for small grants support from trusts and foundations, seeking sponsorships from businesses and encouraging philanthropy.
- ❖ Improve management and service quality to be competitive, as well as to be attractive to donors and potential corporate sponsors. Recruit younger professionals and retirees to join management boards. Ensure Board members are diverse, committed and have a range of skills.
- ❖ Many services are supported by volunteers to keep cost low, such as luncheon clubs, home visits, advice and recreation activities. Further strengthen human resource capacity by recruiting and training skilled volunteers.
- ❖ Integrate Cantonese and Mandarin speaking service users to promote Chinese community cohesion. Introduce new activities and programme to attract new service users, particularly younger retirees, Mandarin speakers and non-Chinese local people.
- ❖ Re-brand Chinese community organisations to appeal more broadly to other communities, promote social integration and open opportunities to access new funding streams. Actively forge working partnerships with other Chinese/non-Chinese community groups or like-minded organisations and

raise the profile of UK Chinese by increasing level of participation in the public sphere, locally and nationally.

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Bishop Ho Ming Wah Association and Community Centre (London)
Camden Chinese Community Centre (London)
Chinese Association of Tower Hamlets (London)
Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham
Chinese National Healthy Living Centre (London)
Chinese Wellbeing (Liverpool)
Chinese Women’s Group – Woolwich (London)
Haringey Chinese Community Centre (London)
Islington Chinese Association (London)
London Chinese Community Centre (London)
Manchester Chinese Centre (Manchester)
Newham Chinese Association (London)
Pagoda Arts (Liverpool)
Wai Yin Society (Manchester)

Report authors:

Polly Sen-yin Ku is a freelance reporter and researcher from Hong Kong. She graduated from The Chinese University of Hong Kong, majoring in Philosophy. She then worked for *Mingpao*, a well-known Chinese newspaper in Hong Kong for 5 years and was a senior reporter when she left. Before starting freelance work in the UK, she worked for the *Europe Commercial News (UK)* as a reporter and editor. She is currently volunteering for the website *Chinese Community News* (www.chineseineurope.com) which aims to provide Chinese information for the Chinese elderly in England.

Dr Yeow Poon is a management consultant with 30 years of experience in supporting the public and voluntary sector with institution strengthening, organisation development, business planning, performance management, change management, improving public service quality and training in leadership and management. He is the Chair of the Chinese Community Centre – Birmingham and a founding member of England China Business Forum.

Editorial board:

Merlene Emerson MBE has a legal background, a former corporate and banking Solicitor in the City of London and Partner of a law firm in Singapore. She retrained as a CEDR Accredited mediator and Restorative Justice Practitioner. She currently divides her time between politics and philanthropy, is Co-Chair of Chinese Welfare Trust, Chair of Lien Viet Housing Association, Director of Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association and Trustee of Sir Heinz Koeppler Trust. She is a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of World Traders and Chair of the Liberal Democrat Race Equality Policy Working Group. She was awarded an MBE in Queen's Birthday honours in 2016 for political and public service.

Dr Lisa Yeung-Donaldson is Project Director of Chinese Welfare Trust. She is an experienced project manager in the voluntary sector, having worked within the UK Chinese community and in a national-level advice agency. She also has had experience teaching in the higher education sectors in Hong Kong and China.

For further information, please contact us at info@chinesewelfaretrust.org.uk